

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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Tip of the hat, kick in the pants



A tip of the hat to the city of Pendleton for moving forward with the large solar array near the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport and Interstate 84.

The steep, minimally useful land helped provide feed for a few cows during the lean months, but once the array is operational it will provide about seven megawatts of solar energy in an average day. That's enough to power a few hundred homes. The power gets sent right into the grid, but it's good to know that Pendleton is working to supply as much energy as it uses.

While we're not there yet, this gets city residents closer to the longterm goal of energy self-sufficiency. And that's something worth getting excited about.

A kick in the pants to the National Football League's decision to punt on a national anthem protest policy.

In case you missed the hubbub in sports media this week, the NFL says that all players on the field will be forced to stand for the anthem, or hide out of sight if they wish to protest. It was a decision that didn't really make anyone happy, while still leaving the NFL vulnerable to future lawsuits.

Everyone should be free to show

their patriotism, while as Americans we should also be free to speak up against the injustices in our world.

As vast amounts of money have entered the NFL in the last 30 years — the value of its franchises growing from millions to billions — it has become a morally corrupt conglomerate that cares for nothing but the bottom line. The inability of its owners and executives to stand up for what is right will cost the league in fans, revenue, and the respect of the nation — except for the most hardened partisans.

Staying in the sports realm, we give the president a tip of the hat for his pardon Thursday of Jack Johnson.

Johnson, an African-American, was the heavyweight champion of the boxing world in the early 20th century, when the sport's popularity was unrivaled. He was boxing's first black champion, and racism and jealousy dogged him throughout his life.

Johnson was convicted by an all-white jury in 1913 of transporting a white woman — his girlfriend, according to the *New York Times* — across state lines. He was forced to flee the country, then serve almost a year in federal prison for that crime. His boxing titles were stripped and he died



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File

Houston Texans players kneel and stand during the singing of the national anthem before a game against the Seattle Seahawks, in Seattle, in October 2017.

nearly penniless in 1946.

Johnson's life is a reminder of the severe racial inequities that have long plagued this country. And while Johnson was not perfect, he deserves a pardon for what we now know was no crime.

And speaking of pardons, we're pleased to hear the clemency cases of Dwight and Steven Hammond could be imminent.

Dwight Hammond was convicted of one count related to a fire that burned 139 acres of BLM land in 2006. Steven Hammond was convicted of one count related to the 2006 fire, and a separate count related to a fire in 2001.

The Hammonds received a fair trial, were found guilty by a jury and handed fair sentences. In addition to lengthy probation, Dwight Hammond

received six months in prison, his son one year. The original prison sentences were served. The appeals court later overturned the original sentence and the trial court ordered the Hammonds to report to a federal prison to serve out the remainder of the five-year sentences it later ruled were mandatory.

Before taking over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, the militia group led by the Bundy clan conducted a rally in Burns in their support. The armed group urged the ranchers to refuse to return to prison and offered them "protection."

To their credit, the Hammonds chose not to make a bad situation worse and to instead follow the rule of law.

The Hammonds have been in prison too long. The president should commute their sentences to time served and send them home.

OTHER VIEWS

10 modest steps to cut gun violence

After the school shooting last Friday in Texas claimed 10 lives, the incoming president of the National Rifle Association, Oliver North, blamed not guns but a "culture of violence" arising from violent movies and the like.

North fueled that culture by working as a pitchman for a shoot-em-up video game, but never mind. Meanwhile, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, R-Texas, was even more imaginative: He blamed too many school entrances and exits, and liberal abortion laws that he claimed had "devalued life."

Really? Folks, look at Japan. Japanese kids relish the same violent entertainment as Americans, and abortion is widely available. Yet at most nine Japanese were murdered with guns across the entire country in all of 2016 — fewer than the 10 killed last week at the Texas high school.

One reason Americans in their late teens are 82 times more likely to be murdered with guns than their peers in other advanced nations is simply that we are awash with guns, some 300 million.

Yet Congress and President Donald Trump have been paralyzed in part because of the NRA refrain: There's nothing to be done! It's us, not the guns. It's hopeless!

In fact, there's plenty we can do. Here are modest steps consistent with the Second Amendment and public opinion:

1. Require universal background checks to see if a purchaser is a felon or a threat to others. The latest study finds that 22 percent of guns are obtained in the U.S. without a background check, and polls find that more than 90 percent of the public supports making these checks universal.

2. Improve background checks by allowing the federal government adequate time to perform them. At the moment, if authorities have not completed the check within three business days, the buyer can get the gun. More than 90 percent of checks are completed within minutes, but a small number require investigation. The shooter who killed nine people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015 should not have been able to purchase a weapon because of a drug history, but the background check was not finished in three days — so he was able to buy it.

3. Pass "red flag laws" that allow a judge to order the temporary removal of a gun from people who are a threat to themselves or others. Connecticut enacted the first



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of these laws back in 1999, and Indiana, California, Washington, Oregon and Florida have passed similar laws since. The idea is that if friends hear someone threaten suicide or mumble about attacking a school, authorities can remove a gun. A hearing is later held with due process protections.

4. Get guns out of the hands of domestic abusers. Nearly half of women murdered in America are killed by a present or past lover, yet the existing laws in this area are full of loopholes.

5. Require safe storage of guns, preferably in a safe or at least with a trigger lock. One study found that only a minority of gun owners in the U.S. keep all their guns secure. When guns aren't stored safely, it is easier for children to find them and play with them, for teenagers to use them for suicides, or for burglars to steal them. Some 300,000 guns are stolen each year in the United States.

6. Make serial numbers harder to file off, and require microstamping, so that cartridges can be traced back to the gun that fired the bullets.

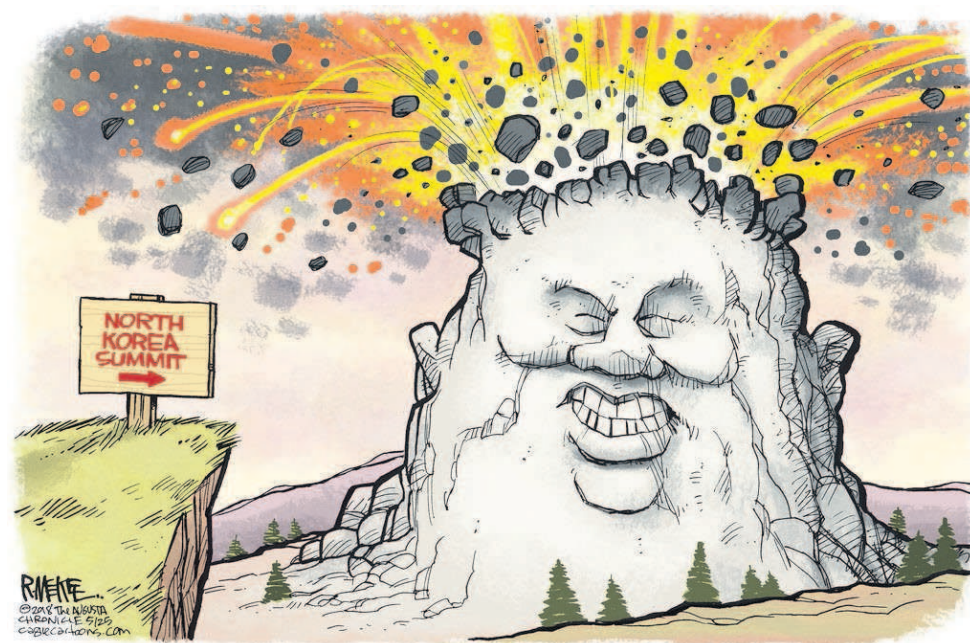
7. Invest in "smart guns" that require a PIN, fingerprint or nearby bracelet to fire. It's outrageous that someone who steals my iPhone is foiled by my PIN, but stolen guns can be immediately fired. Smart guns shouldn't be obligatory, but they should be an option. The way forward is for a police force to experiment with smart guns, giving them credibility with the public.

8. Support community anti-violence programs, like Cure Violence and Becoming a Man, that work with at-risk young people and show excellent success in reducing shootings. One study showed each dollar invested resulted in at least \$5 in savings from reduced crime.

9. Limit buyers in most cases to one or two gun purchases a month, to reduce gun trafficking.

10. Invest in gun buybacks. Since 1994, Americans have acquired an additional 100 million guns. The average gun-owning household now has eight firearms, and as owners die there should be a big push to acquire these guns.

These are modest steps that should be acceptable to reasonable people across the political spectrum. Let's take action rather than myopically whining about violent movies or proposing door control.



YOUR VIEWS

Reading 'George' could have caused emotional harm

I am going to borrow one of the newspaper's practices and assign a tip of the hat to the Hermiston School District, and a kick in the pants to the *East Oregonian*.

As described in the May 1 issue of the newspaper, the district canceled elementary school participation in the annual statewide Battle of the Books for the following year. This happened because one of the books on the list, "George," was considered by the district to be inappropriate for third- through fifth-grade students.

When I read the article I was proud of the Hermiston School District for putting concern for the well-being of students ahead of political correctness. Before long I found that my feeling was not shared by all (no surprise); the school district was strongly criticized in a letter to the editor and in an *East Oregonian* editorial.

If I were a parent of a student in grades 3-5, I would be pleased that the school district was attempting to protect my

child from a situation involving potential emotional harm. After all, if the school administrators believe that a book's subject matter is not suitable for a child at a certain stage of development, it seems wise to follow this judgment, and not to leave the child to "sink or swim."

School personnel have a moral obligation to their students to provide education which they consider to be in the students' best interests. They are in a position to evaluate children's needs better than members of most other occupations, including newspaper editors.

What I think we have seen from the district's critics is a "rush to judgment" based on a desire to achieve political correctness regardless of consequences. If this is indeed the case, the result is not worth the effort.

I hope that the Hermiston School District will continue to stand by its values and not cave in to the critics who would replace them with something less valuable to students.

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